

Charlottesville Tomorrow Interview

Q. Please describe your past experience that qualifies you to be on Albemarle Board of Supervisors?

As a native of Albemarle and a 1967 graduate of Albemarle High School, I have a perspective of our collective history and how we ended up here. This is an important asset when dealing with issues which have recurred many times over the last 50 years. Luckily my parents encouraged me and my siblings to see other parts of the country.

I achieved a degree in biology at Connecticut College and worked in the university research lab in Boston. Residing in Boston taught me about some successful ways that urban areas handle population density, parks and green spaces, traffic and transit. Despite our smaller Albemarle population, we have many opportunities to plan ahead, to save financial and natural resources as we grow. There is no need to reinvent the wheel....

Other supervisors criticize my town hall meetings as unnecessary, but I know meetings are essential to the voters' sense of engagement and confidence, and the many contributions of ideas from our citizens. I had been in the audience for 17 years in Board of Supervisors meetings before I decided to run for office. The Daily Progress four years ago described me as a citizen-activist and I take that as a great kudo because I am loyal to the citizens and to the community. I don't feel like I'm anchored to any particular special interest group. I've been particularly focused on the environment and land use and transportation for more than 20 years.

Q. What is the top priority in your personal strategic plan for action by the board of supervisors if you are elected?

On the strategic plan, planning ahead is critically important for local government. I applaud the work begun approximately eight years ago under the leadership of Tom Foley who is now our County Executive. The reason to plan is to analyze the best time to make investments in capital projects based on need and the ability to pay. Using the five year planning horizon allows the county to anticipate costs and even out expenses over several years. When planning to build a facility, spreading the cost over these several years makes less impact on the annual budget than borrowing the total all at once.

As our county financial advisers have suggested, there is extra borrowing capacity within our budget and our current tax rate. We should take this opportunity to construct the Crozet library now, while we can take advantage of the remaining bid of reduced project costs and the extremely low borrowing costs at half of the rate of several years ago. Before making this decision, we must be assured that our revenue values are

within the anticipated range. The only good reason to postpone would be to prevent the county to entering debt it could not pay back.

As financial stability returns, I support restoring the appropriate portion of tourism money to the ACE program to resume purchasing conservation easements from willing landowners. .As the economy begins to pick up speed, the county staff must grow to provide prompt and careful oversight of development projects – to maintain the valued high performance of projects here in Albemarle. Looking forward to plan for these staff increases will be important in the next budget year.

Investments to comply with the Chesapeake Bay cleanup efforts will take larger chunks of staff time and money. Storm water regulations recently adopted will also require capital improvements to our systems. The results of these efforts will benefit local residents, however, and also the Chesapeake Bay, as improvements of our impaired waterways and reductions in erosion and sedimentation will increase the recreational and ecological health of our rivers and streams.

Q. Do you believe the Western Bypass project is consistent with the character of our community and the public's vision for transportation in Albemarle County?

I do not support construction of the currently designed Western Bypass for the reasons noted in the question. . It is not helpful and it certainly does not fit in with the Comprehensive Plan. But if the road is going to be built, we must work to make sure it is the best road we can get. I've been a student of land use and transportation since 1978. My learning began as part of the national land use study with the League of Women Voters. I've followed the history of the bypass since it was proposed many years ago. Many different governors, secretaries of transportation, and Commonwealth Transportation Board members have supported the road in concept until they study it in detail, when they change their mind.

We have had a long series of meetings this summer that have thrown the confidence of our citizens into disarray regarding the way local government has operated with this project. It certainly is not the community vision to have decisions made without input. It is not the community vision for a small number of people to ignore the clear wishes of a huge majority, both in the meetings and in writing who have addressed their concerns about the enormous environmental impact that this design will have on our community.

A huge number of citizens are continually concerned about this project, about the lack of transparency in the state-level decisions, the rapid change, rapid escalation of the cost, and the misrepresentation of that cost before the Commonwealth Transportation Board. I believe this process has been inconsistent in every way with our interest in the protection of the environment, our protection of our school facilities and our desire for open government. And we will see how it all turns out.

Q. What role should local government play to stimulate economic vitality? Do you support Albemarle’s economic vitality plan and are there areas you recommend for improvement?

The role that local government should play is to find ways to emphasize Albemarle County’s strengths. Because our strengths, our current quality of life, is what will attract future business investment to our area and bring future residents.

Essential to our success with the economic vitality plan is the active participation of citizens. Facing a redirection of regulations in the proposed January, 2010 Economic Development Plan, citizens and board debates changed the plan to one, based on the Comprehensive Plan with existing zoning. The adopted Economic Vitality Plan encourages our local entrepreneurial, agricultural and artisan businesses – rather than focusing on more big boxes – within the existing regulations and guidelines for natural resource protection. This is a way to continue our quality of life and what people have come to rely on in Albemarle County. The emphasis on our long-held values of the Comprehensive Plan and the inclusion of rural area enterprises made the plan supportable by me and a wide range of other citizens.

We can no longer rely on the University for our economic development. We must encourage the community to support our startups and our longtime local businesses and keep our dollars local. Saving a few cents at a national chain sends all that revenue away to other places. We must also address the workforce mismatch between workers and available work. According to a study by the Thomas Jefferson Partnership for Economic Development, over 30,000 people exit the county for work daily, while another 30,000 enter. The county suffered hyper-inflation of housing prices during the mid-2000s, which has added to this mismatch. As the available housing stock achieves a more reasonable price, living locally may become more of a possibility for our teachers, police, firefighters and other employees who currently reside in neighboring counties.

Q. Should the board consider boundary adjustments for Albemarle County’s designated growth areas to create new locations for business on land currently zoned as rural areas? Does it matter if the land is in the watershed of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir?

The short answer to your question is no. And the short answer to the question “Does it matter if land is in the South Fork Rivanna watershed?”, the answer is yes it matters – tremendously – because that is the reason why we plan the way we have planned in the last 30 years.

I'm not in favor of expanding the growth area at this time. This Comprehensive Plan-level decision must be based on need for the community and the benefit to the entire community, and not limited to the potential profit of one applicant. The Comprehensive Plan changes adopted in 1980 created a growth area of 5% of the county's acres, reserving the remaining 95% as rural area devoted primarily to agriculture and forestry with incidental or accessory residential development and associated small businesses. The rural economy has grown with the success of our wineries and the local food movement, both contributing to the development of the county's niche in food production.

The growth area designation is a contract with our citizens, as are our master plans. The boundary is the predictor of future development and is relied upon by the citizens as they invest in new homes and businesses. Our growth area is so large already that leapfrog development has already occurred. Rather than growing concentrically from the inside, projects have hopped over open land and sprung up at the remote areas of the designated growth area, increasing traffic demands on the corridors between these urban density areas.

Q. In recent budgets, the board of supervisors has chosen not to raise taxes to provide additional funds for capital budget needs such that the current capital budget primarily supports only maintenance projects. How will you address capital funding needs as part of the next county budget?

I have talked to many county residents about taxes. They are unhappy about the necessity for a higher tax rate. But they understand the consequences if we do not, and they are willing to support and equalized tax rate – especially last year when I was just focused on the equalized tax rate as a goal. And they understood that how, if each person is able to put in the same amount of money as they put in the year before, (when there were higher values), then that would supply an extra four or five million dollars, which we could have been leveraged into ten times that amount for construction projects.

We have been hoarding our funds and been almost mired in inertia because the fallen economy is such a great excuse to not do anything. And there are some residents of our county who don't want to do anything. They don't believe in government. But I do believe that there is an essential responsibility of government to provide for school facilities, provide for recreational facilities, do our very best to have careful use of our water and our resources and recycling facilities. There is tremendous support in the community for all of these things.

The community and staff have anticipated the construction of the Crozet library for many years. It entered the need list in 1988 when the library was found to be below state standards for the population then. This library is now shovel-ready. The plans are done. It was number one on the capital list just before the economic downturn and has safety issues which place it in the emergency category.

On the school side, the School Board has the challenging task of anticipating and planning for the students of the future. This is important because of the many years it takes to bring additional facilities into use. It is challenging because the schools are often the last to know when people move into or out of the system. The School Board will study all the alternatives to new building, including understanding capacity for each of its current facilities and the districts that the schools currently serve. These studies will provide information before new investments are planned.

The hardest challenge is going to be moving out of our state of inertia and taking that first step to get back to the program that our citizens have relied upon for 30 years.

Q. Will you consider raising the real estate property tax rate in the next county budget to invest in capital funding priorities? Why or why not?

I would consider it. I doubt that I will hear a tremendous sea change from my citizens at the winter town halls, but there will be more information that will come forward with our county finances, and also with the state of the economy nationally and internationally. The national and international part has been the most alarming, because we can't control it at all, and yet it has tremendous consequences for us locally. So, it has given us pause about making some of these investments that I feel are essential to our longtime success.

I hope that we can get the board to at the very least vote for an equalized tax rate. It is long overdue, and there have been some improvements in our local economy to suggest that we are level rather than continuing to descend into the pit of economic failure. So I would like to capitalize on that optimism that our local citizens have, and ask them, at the very least, to have an equalized tax rate. We were close in discussions last spring and actually had gained one more vote to actually raise the rate by a penny to put the whole increase into capital. But we weren't able to get that one extra vote to make it 4-2. I will continue to work on that issue.